

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 00827

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AS, FR

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO FRANCE

REF: (A) CANBERRA 138 (B) EC BRUSSELS 0174

BEGIN SUMMARY: AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM VISITED FRANCE JANUARY 6 TO 8. IN ADDITION TO PRIVATE TALKS WITH PRESIDENT GISCARD AND PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC, THERE WERE GROUP DISCUSSIONS PRESIDED OVER BY THE RESPECTIVE PRIME MINISTERS. AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF SAID THAT ALTHOUGH VISIT DID NOT RESULT IN SIGNING OF ANY AGREEMENTS OR CONCLUSION OF ANY SPECTACULAR TRADE DEAL OR INVESTMENT PROJECT, IT WAS VERY IMPORTANT IN SIGNALLING AN END TO THE FRANCO/AUSTRALIAN FEUD OVER FRENCH NUCLEAR TESTING IN THE PACIFIC. RESULT OF THE VISIT SHOULD BE MORE FRANCO/AUSTRALIAN CONTACTS. END SUMMARY

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1. AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM VISITED PARIS

JANUARY 6 - 8. HIS HOUR LONG PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH FRENCH PRESIDENT GISCARD AND PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC WERE CONDUCTED IN ENGLISH SINCE NOT EVEN AN INTERPRETER WAS PRESENT. IN ADDITION, THERE WERE LARGER SESSIONS WITH CHIRAC AND INDUSTRY MINISTER D'ORNANO WITH EXPERTS PRESENT ON EACH SIDE.

2. AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL COUNSELLOR WALKER SAID THAT VISIT HAD BEEN A SUCCESS WITHIN THE LIMITS OF WHAT EACH SIDE HAD WISHED TO ACCOMPLISH. THERE HAD BEEN NO SPECTACULAR NEW AGREEMENTS, NO IMPORTANT TRADE DEALS, OR OTHER MAJOR EVENT. HOWEVER, VISIT WAS USEFUL FROM BOTH SIDES IN LAYING TO REST THE FRANCO/AUSTRALIAN DISPUTE OVER THE FRENCH NUCLEAR TESTING IN THE PACIFIC. AS WHITLAM ANNOUNCED IN PRESENCE OF CHIRAC THERE ARE NOW NO OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS BETWEEN FRANCE AND AUSTRALIA.

3. AUSTRALIANS FELT THAT UNDER GISCARD, GOF NO LONGER HAS SOME OF THE COMPLEXES ABOUT AUSTRALIA WHICH PREVIOUSLY CHARACTERIZED RELATIONS. SOME FRENCH OFFICIALS HAD PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT AUSTRALIA MERELY SERVED U.S. INTERESTS, OTHERS THOUGHT THE NEW AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WAS RESPONSIVE TO THE USSR, AND SOME EVEN THOUGHT AUSTRALIAN OPPOSITION TO FRENCH TESTING WAS A COVER FOR A DESIRE TO OCCUPY FRENCH ISLANDS IN THE PACIFIC.

4. MR. WALKER NOTED THAT FRANCE WAS VERY CONCERNED -- AS WAS AUSTRALIA -- BY THE CURRENT WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS AND WISHED BETTER RELATIONS WITH AUSTRALIA AS A SOURCE OF RAW MATERIALS AND A MARKET FOR ITS EXPORTS. AS MENTIONED IN LE MONDE, THE TRADE TALKS CONCERNED PARTICULARLY URANIUM, NATURAL GAS, THE AIRBUS.

5. URANIUM. WALKER SAID THAT WHITLAM HAD MADE CLEAR IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE THE LIMITED NATURE OF THE CONVERSATION WITH THE FRENCH ABOUT URANIUM MINING OR ENRICHMENT. THE AUSTRALIANS EXPLAINED THEIR AGREEMENT WITH THE JAPANESE TO EXPLOIT AUSTRALIA'S URANIUM JOINTLY. SINCE NEITHER COUNTRY HAS THE TECHNOLOGY NOW
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TO CONSTRUCT A URANIUM ENRICHMENT PLANT, THERE WOULD SOON BE A VISIT BY A UK TEAM ACCOMPANIED BY DUTCH AND GERMAN COLLEAGUES (REFS A AND B). FOLLOWING THAT VISIT THE AUSTRALIANS WOULD ACCEPT A VISIT BY THE FRENCH WHICH WOULD RESUME THE EXPLORATORY DISCUSSION, INTERRUPTED TWO YEARS AGO, ON THE POSSIBILITY OF BUILDING AN ENRICHMENT PLANT USING FRENCH GASEOUS DIFFUSION TECHNOLOGY. MORE CONCRETE DISCUSSIONS COULD TAKE

PLACE ONLY AFTER THESE VISITS TOOK PLACE, AND WHITLAM
REFUSED TO BE DRAWN BY THE PRESS INTO ANY SPECULATION
ABOUT THE FUTURE.

6. AIRBUS. WALKER SAID THAT IN THE CASE OF THE AIRBUS,
THEY MERELY EXPLAINED TO THE FRENCH THAT THEY WERE NOT
SURE THAT THE DOMESTIC AIRLINES WOULD CONCLUDE THAT
TRAVEL EXPANSION WOULD NECESSITATE THE PURCHASE OF SUCH
AIRCRAFT. THEY ASSURED THE FRENCH, HOWEVER, THAT IF

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SUCH AN AIRCRAFT WERE NEEDED, THERE WOULD BE NO DISCRIM-
INATION AGAINST THE FRENCH AND THE CHOICE BETWEEN THE
AIRBUS AND THE TRISTAR WOULD BE BASED ON TECHNICAL
QUALIFICATIONS.

7. WHITLAM ALSO DISCUSSED THE NEGOTIATION OF AGREEMENTS ON SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION, CULTURAL COOPERATION AND DOUBLE TAXATION. IN THREE MONTHS THE FRENCH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN COMMERCE, SEGARD, WOULD VISIT AUSTRALIA TO SEE ABOUT FRENCH INVESTMENTS, BUT ALSO THE EXPANSION OF FRENCH EXPORTS, WALKER THOUGHT. THE FRENCH WERE PROBABLY INTERESTED IN INVESTMENTS, SUCH AS THE CURRENT PARTICIPATION IN BAUXITE EXPLOITATION. WALKER COMMENTED THAT THE GOOD COOPERATION BETWEEN THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT AND FRENCH INDUSTRY MADE VISITS SUCH AS THAT OF SEGARD VERY USEFUL. WALKER ALSO
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NOTED THAT WHITLAM'S GOVERNMENT WOULD ALSO WISH TO MAINTAIN GOVERNMENTAL MONITORING OF ANY ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN FOREIGN AND AUSTRALIAN COMPANIES.

8. WHITLAM REFUSED TO TELL THE PRESS ABOUT THE TETE-A-TETE CONVERSATIONS HE HAD HELD WITH GISCARD AND CHIRAC AND TOLD THE EMBASSY VERY LITTLE. HE SAID THEY HAD DISCUSSED A WIDE RANGE OF WORLD PROBLEMS AND THEIR VIEWS WERE IN GENERAL AGREEMENT. WHITLAM SUPPORTED THE FRENCH ENERGY PROPOSAL BECAUSE OF HIS DESIRE FOR CONSULTATION RATHER THAN CONFRONTATION. AS FOR AUSTRALIAN SUPPORT FOR EC, WHITLAM MADE IT CLEAR THAT HIS GOVERNMENT STRONGLY SUPPORTED A STRONG EUROPE. AUSTRALIA'S PROSPERITY WOULD DEPEND ON THAT OF EUROPE AS A WHOLE, THE LARGEST TRADING PARTNER OF AUSTRALIA. WHITLAM CONSIDERED RETROGRADE THE VIEW THAT AUSTRALIA WOULD BENEFIT FROM THE REESTABLISHMENT OF ITS FORMER PRIVILEGED RELATIONSHIP WITH A UK WHICH HAD WITHDRAWN FROM THE EC. WALKER COMMENTED THAT THE AUSTRALIANS WERE VERY ANNOYED WITH ANTI-EC LABORITES WHO INVOKED AUSTRALIA TO SUPPORT THEIR OWN OPPOSITION TO UK PARTICIPATION IN THE EC.

9. CAMBODIA. THE FRENCH SAID THAT WHILE THEY WERE BOTH FOR PEACEFUL SOLUTION OF THE CAMBODIAN PROBLEM, THE FRENCH DID NOT THINK THAT CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO KHMER SIDES (ASEAN RESOLUTION) WOULD BE THE MEANS OF ARRIVING AT ONE. THE FRENCH SAID THAT THEY HAD OTHER IDEAS ABOUT A POLITICAL SOLUTION, BUT THEY DID NOT ELABORATE ON THEM. WHITLAM SAID AUSTRALIA SUPPORTED THE ASEAN PROPOSAL. THE FRENCH IMPLIED CLEARLY THAT THEY WERE CONSIDERING AN INTERMEDIARY ROLE BECAUSE OF THEIR LONG INVOLVEMENT IN THE AREA, BUT DID NOT SUGGEST TO THE AUSTRALIANS THAT THEY PLAY ANY ROLE. A PROPOS OF CAMBODIA WHITLAM TOLD THE PRESS THAT "THERE WAS OBVIOUSLY AN INTEREST EXPRESSED BY US IN THE CONTRIBUTIONS WHICH FRANCE CAN MAKE IN THOSE TERRITORIES

FOR WHICH OVER 100 YEARS SHE HAS HAD A PARTICULAR
INTEREST. FRENCH CONTRIBUTIONS IN THAT PART OF THE WORLD
COULD CLEARLY BE OF GREAT VALUE AND THEREFORE OF GREAT
INTEREST TO US WHO LIVE NEAR IT AND WHO HAVE HAD
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UNFORTUNATE INVOLVEMENTS IN IT."

10. BOTH SIDES CONSIDERED THE VISIT A CONSIDERABLE
SUCCESS. AUSTRALIAN PRESS REACTION HAD BEEN FAVORABLE,
AND THE FRENCH HAD INDICATED THAT THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE
POPULAR SATISFACTION AT THE END OF THE FRANCO/AUSTRALIAN
SPAT OVER FRANCE'S NUCLEAR TESTING -- INCLUDING THE
SOMETIMES SNIDE FRENCH COUNTERCRITICISMS OF THE
AUSTRALIANS. WALKER THOUGHT THAT WHITLAM'S PERSONALITY,
HIS DIRECT, NO-NONSENSE APPROACH CONTRIBUTED TO THE
SUCCESS OF HIS VISIT. HE HAD APPARENTLY HAD PARTICULAR
SUCCESS WITH INTELLIGENT FRENCH LEADERS SUCH AS GISCARD
AND CHIRAC. WALKER CONCLUDED THAT THE VISIT SHOULD
RESULT IN INCREASING -- AND INCREASINGLY EFFECTIVE --
CONTACTS BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND AUSTRALIANS.
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